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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SINGAPORE 001812

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [ASEAN](#) [BM](#) [SN](#)  
SUBJECT: SINGAPORE MEDIA COMES DOWN HARD ON BURMESE JUNTA;  
MFA CONFIRMS GAMBARI PASSING THROUGH SINGAPORE

REF: A. SINGAPORE 1795

[1](#)B. SINGAPORE 1782

Classified By: DCM Daniel L. Shields. Reasons 1.4 (b)(d).

[1](#)1. Summary: Singapore's government-controlled press has been uncharacteristically critical of the Burmese regime, with a Straits Times editorial calling on it to "manage -- with as much decency and dispatch as it can muster -- its own demise." Meanwhile, the MFA issued another press statement, this time spotlighting UNSYG Special Advisor Gambari's passing through Singapore on his way to Burma (paragraph 6). Along with Singapore's leadership on the unusually tough statement issued by ASEAN Foreign Ministers in New York, the media focus suggests Singapore is fed up with the regime and wants to position itself, and ASEAN, on the side of the "angels" in Burma. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Post has been struck by the degree to which Singapore's tightly controlled press has been forward-leaning throughout the current crisis in Burma. Most remarkable was a Straits Times editorial published September 28, which essentially called for an end to the Burmese regime: "The current regime...cannot point to anything positive that can justify its continued iron grip on power... The junta has starved the people politically as well as materially. There is absolutely nothing it can do now to redeem its long and dismal record other than manage -- with as much decency and dispatch as it can muster -- its own demise."

[1](#)3. (SBU) The protests in Burma have received wide-ranging and prominent Singaporean press coverage since they began. The Straits Times (estimated readership 1 million) has covered the events in particular depth, including stories from its correspondents in Bangkok and New Delhi and large color photographs of the protests. On September 28, the front page, above the fold, featured a photograph of the dead Japanese photographer. In general, the press has been noticeably sympathetic toward the monks and democracy protesters, including coverage of their hardships, grievances, and efforts to circumvent official censorship through blogs and the internet.

[1](#)4. (SBU) A "Today" op-ed titled "Why ASEAN is the only hope" on September 27 called for ASEAN action. The article argued that "At the very least, (ASEAN) should send an urgent mission to persuade the generals not to resort to force." The authors urged, "ASEAN needs to act now rather than express regret when there is blood on the streets. For if that happens, it will not be just Myanmar whose international reputation will suffer, but the whole region."

15. (SBU) A Straits Times editorial September 28 also urged ASEAN to issue a strong statement against the Burmese regime and voiced support for the dispatch of special envoy Ibrahim Gambari. This appeal foreshadowed the unusually strong statement issued by ASEAN Foreign Ministers from New York and activism in New York on the part of ASEAN Chair and Singapore Minister for Foreign Affairs George Yeo. The MFA issued a press statement September 28 highlighting the fact that Gambari had met with MFA officials while passing through Singapore on his way to Burma, and that MFA officials expressed "strong support" for his mission (see full statement in paragraph 5).

16. (U) Text of September 28 MFA statement:

UN Secretary General's Special Advisor Ibrahim Gambari is passing through Singapore on his way to Myanmar. He met officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) today. They reiterated Singapore's strong support for Mr. Gambari's mission to Myanmar and expressed the hope that the Myanmar authorities would give Mr. Gambari and the UN their full cooperation so as to find a peaceful resolution to the situation in Myanmar. End text of MFA statement.

COMMENT

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17. (C) Singapore's tightly regulated press is not in the habit of getting out front of the government and we doubt it is doing so now. Also noteworthy are MFA's series of increasingly forceful press statements (reftels), its spotlighting of Gambari's transit and reception here, and Singapore's apparent leadership in pushing for an unusually

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tough ASEAN statement in New York. Singapore has always seemed more concerned with stability than human rights in Burma. But the GOS now appears fed up with the regime's brutality, insularity, and incompetence. At the least, the GOS seems to have concluded that it's time to position itself, and ASEAN, more on the side of the angels. End comment.

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